

Sri Krishna Kathamrita



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Issue 590

atithi-sevā

Service to Uninvited Guests





तवकथामृतं तसजीवनम्
tava kathāmṛtaṁ tapta-jīvanam

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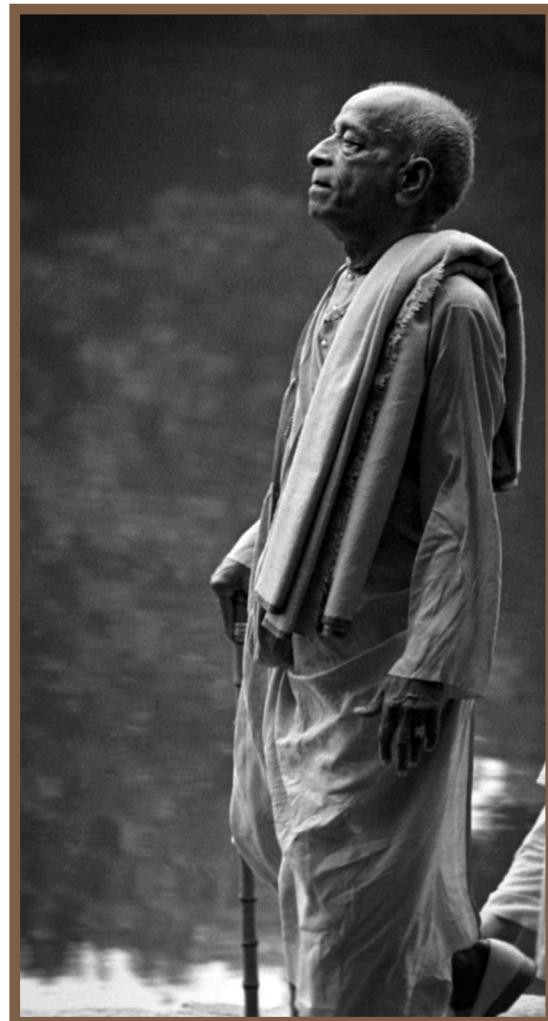
SERVING GUESTS



*His Divine Grace
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada*

In India the custom is that even an ordinary person is offered a glass of water if he suddenly visits and one cannot offer him foodstuff. If there is no water, then one can offer a sitting place, even if it is on straw mats. And if one has no straw mat, he can immediately cleanse the ground and ask the guest to sit there. Supposing that a householder cannot even do that, then with folded hands he can simply receive the guest, saying 'Welcome.' And if he cannot do that, then he should feel very sorry for his poor condition and shed tears and simply offer obeisances with his whole family, wife, and children. (Purport to *Bhāg.* 4.22.10.)

According to the Vedic principles, there must always be a guest in the householder's house. In my childhood I have actually seen my father receive not less than four guests every day, and in those days my father's income was not very great. Nonetheless, there was no difficulty in offering *prasāda* to at least four guests every day. (Purport to *Cc. madhya* 3.41.)



Unknown photographer.

Unknown artist, 1780, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh



Sita, Rama and Lakshman at the ashram of Bharadvaj Muni

Atithi means uninvited guest, hospitality. If somebody comes at your home without your invitation, he is called atithi. Tithi means particular time and date. But a person who arrives at your home without any invitation on a particular time and date, is called atithi. Atithi-satkāra. (From a lecture in Bombay, 14 August 1975.) 🍍

**As Good As
SERVING GURU**



Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada

A stranger who stays in a householder's residence for one day and leaves the next is called an *atithi*, or guest. The householders have the opportunity to serve such guests for only one day. It is the *vyavahāra-dharma*, or rule of etiquette, for a householder to serve his guests. Honoring guests is as good as serving the spiritual master; in other words, a guest is as worshipable as Lord Narayan. (Purport to *Caitanya-bhāgavata* ādi 5.23)

Those attached householders who give up the service of guests who stay for one day and wandering *sannyāsīs* who are engaged in pleasing

Lord Vishnu and remain busy in householder duties like cooking for themselves are lower than even birds and beasts. Inferior animals like birds and beasts fly in the sky or wander the earth in order to gather their food and have little opportunity to collect. But since human beings are the highest social entities, they are obliged to follow the principles of *varṇāśrama*. If they are averse to even these principles, then they will be counted among the unsheltered naked birds and beasts, who are busy simply filling their own bellies. Apart from filling their own bellies, human beings have the higher responsibility of collecting and protecting items for the service of Vishnu. For this reason, giving shelter and food to guests and wandering mendicants who desire to please Narayana and benefit the living entities is among their social duties. If human beings transgress this duty, they will be considered lower than even birds and beasts. (Purport to *Caitanya-bhāgavata* ādi 14.22) 🍍



Garuda carrying Rukmini and Krishna



Unknown artist, Gita Press, Gorakhpur.

Bharat and Satrughna offer respects to Rama

THE DHARMA OF A GRIHASTHA



Sri Srimad Gour Govinda Swami Maharaja

A *grhastha* is not attached to money, so why does he earn money? *tomāra kāryera* — “To meet the expenditure of your *samsāra*, your family, I earn money. Otherwise, I have no need of money.”

A *grhastha* earns for Krishna’s family, Krishna’s *samsāra*, and some portion he will put into savings in a bank or a safe. For what purpose? In case some *atithis*, guests, come without prior notice — some traveling mendicants who arrive all of a sudden — to render service to them a *grhastha* should save some money.

Birds, beasts, species other than human, never save anything. Every day they go out and whatever necessity they have they immediately use. But a human being, *grhastha*, will save. For what purpose? To render nice service to guests — *atithi-sevā*. That is *grhastha-dharma*, the *dharma* of a *grhastha*. Householders who don’t do so are like naked animals, birds and beasts, because they

cannot save. They have no opportunity to save, and they cannot serve guests. However, when one becomes a householder, *grhastha*, if one doesn’t do *atithi-sevā* — rendering service to guests who appear suddenly without prior notice — then one is no better than a bird or a beast. 🍍

— From a lecture in Toulouse, France, 15 August 1994.

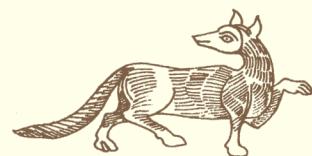


HOMES OF JACKALS

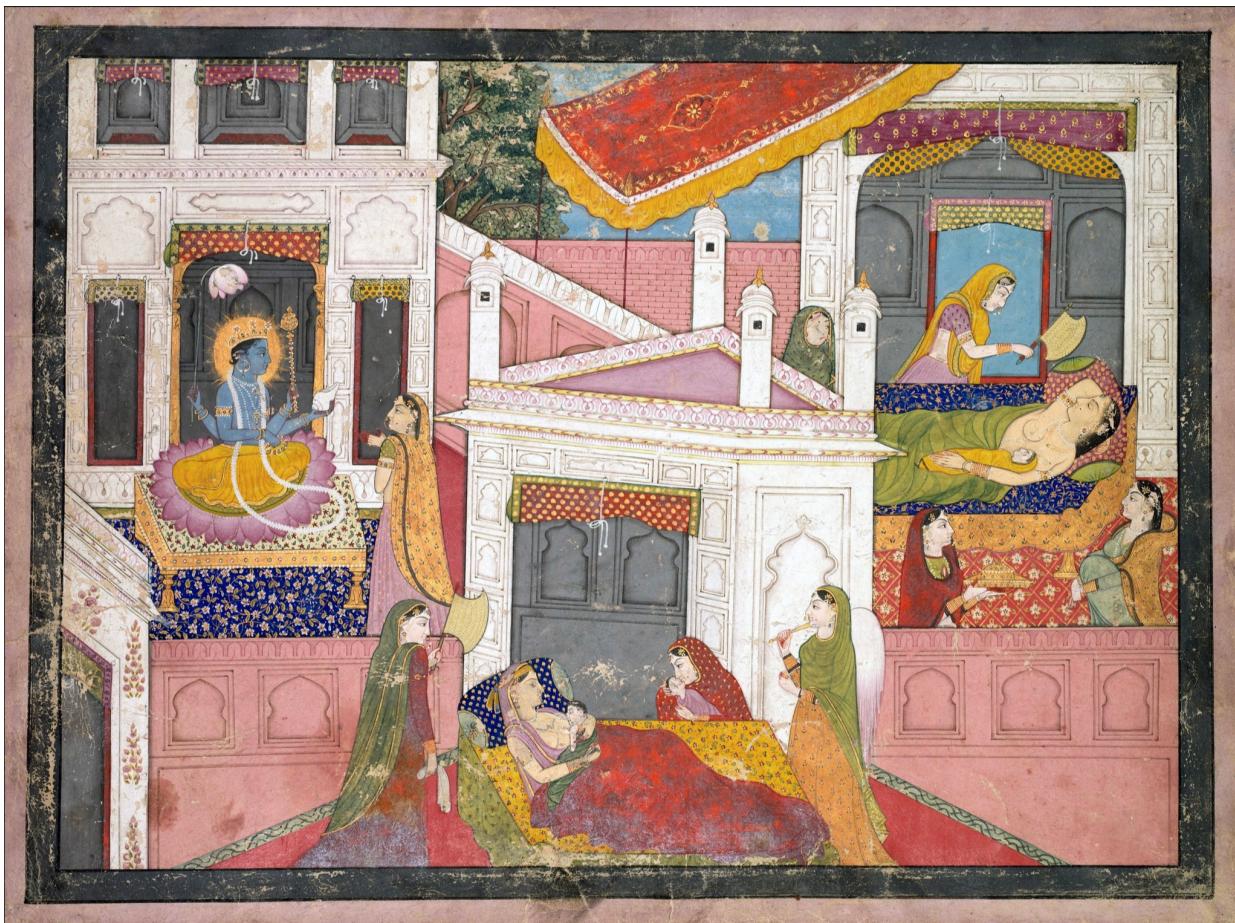
Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 8.16.7

*grheṣu yesv atithayo nārcitāḥ salilair api
yadi niryānti te nūnāṁ pherurāja-grhōpamāḥ*

Homes from which [uninvited] guests go away without having been received even with an offering of a little water are like those holes in the field that are the homes of jackals.



Unknown artist. Pahari, Kangra painting. From the court of Aniruddh Chand. c. 1820-30.



The birth of Lord Ramachandra and his brothers. Painting from the Bāla-kāṇḍa section of the Adhyātma-rāmāyaṇa of the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa

GLORIES OF SERVING GUESTS



From Nārada Pañcarātra

atithir yasya puṣṭo hi tasya puṣṭo hariḥ svayam
harau tuṣṭe gurus tuṣṭo gurau tuṣṭe jagat trayam

Lord Hari himself is pleased with one who has pleased a guest (atithi – literally “one who comes unexpectedly or at no particular time”). When Hari is pleased then the guru is pleased. And when the guru is pleased then the whole world becomes satisfied.

adhiṣṭhātā 'tithir gehe santatām sarva-devatāḥ
tīrthāny etāni sarvāṇī puṇyāṇī ca vratāṇī ca
tapāṁsi yajñāḥ satyām ca śīlām dharmaḥ sukarma ca
apūjītair atithibhiḥ sārdha sarve prayānti te

When a guest remains in a house, all of the devas reside with him in that house. Therefore, all holy places, all good merits, vows, austerities, sacrifices, truth, fame, good conduct, dharma, and righteous acts leave a place together with a guest that goes away after not having been properly worshiped.

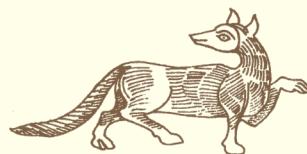
stri-ghnaiś caiva kṛta-ghnaiś ca brahma-ghnair guru-talpagaiḥ
viśvās aghātibhir dustair mitra-drohibhir eva ca
satya-ghnaiś ca kṛta-ghnaiś ca pāpibhiḥ sthāpibhis tathā
dānāpahāribhiś caiva kanyā-vikrayibhis tathā
śimāpahāribhiś caiva mithyā-sākṣi-pradātṛbhiḥ
brahmaśva-hāribhiś caiva tathā sthāpyasva-hāribhiḥ

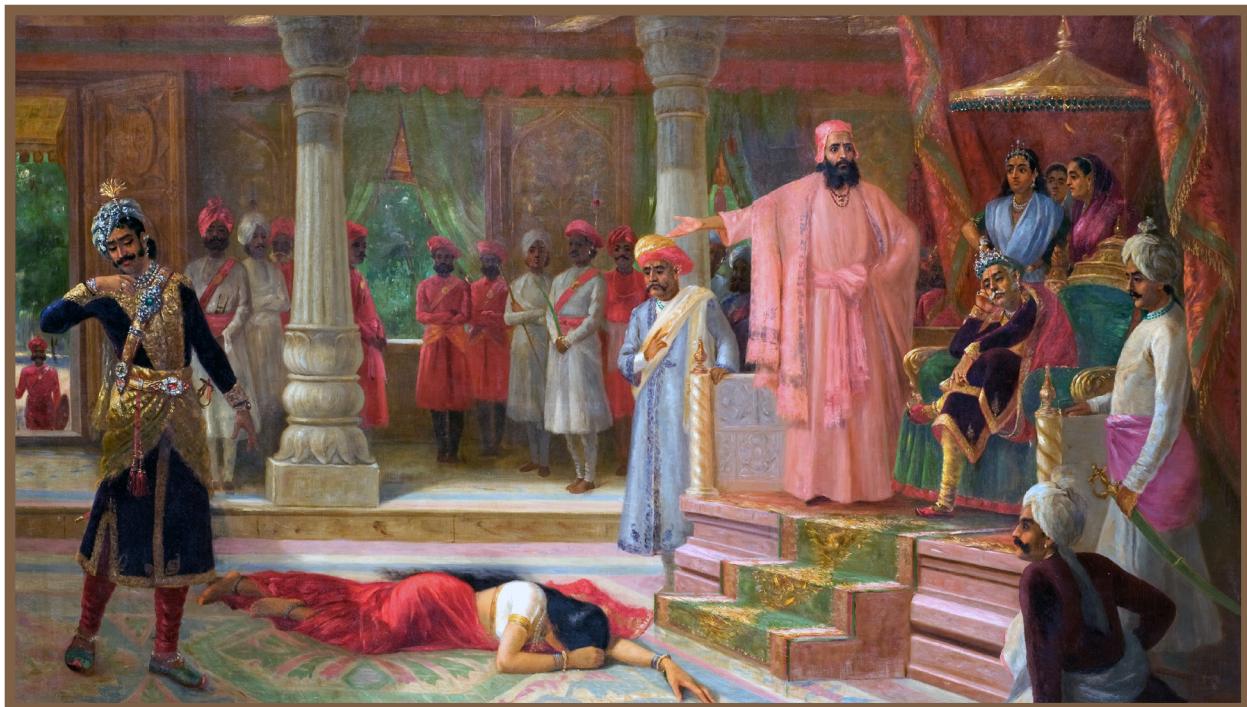
LOWER THAN A BEAST

*Srila Vrindavan Das Thakur's
Śri Caitanya-bhāgavata ādi 14.22*

gr̥hastha ha-iyā atithi-seva nā kare
paśu-pakṣī ha-ite 'adhamā' bali tā're

If a householder does not serve his guests, he is considered lower than the birds and beasts.





Painting by Raja Ravi Varma.

Draupadi humiliated in Virata's darbar by Kichaka

vr̥ṣa-vāhairs devalaiś ca tathaiva grāma-yājibhiḥ
 śūdrātra-bhojabhiś caiva śūdra-śrāddhāha-bhojabhiḥ
 śrī-kṛṣṇa-vimukhair viprair hiṁsrair nara-vighātibhiḥ
 gurāv-abhaktai rogārtaiḥ śāśvan mithyā-pravādibhiḥ
 vipra-strī-gāmibhiḥ śūdrair mātr-gāmibhir eva ca
 aśvattha-ghātibhiś caiva patnibhiḥ pati-ghātibhiḥ
 pitr-mātr-ghātibhiś ca śaranāgata-ghātibhiḥ
 brāhmaṇa-kṣatravīt śūdraiḥ śīlās varṇāpahāribhiḥ

That person who does not duly worship a guest is compared to one who kills his wife; who is treacherous;

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who kills a Brahmin; who has sex with the wife of his guru; who betrays others; who is wicked; who betrays friends; who murders truth; who is sinful; who steals a gift meant for another; who sells a daughter; who encroaches on other's lands; who gives false witness; who steals a Brahmin's property; who steals items received in trust; who uses bulls for personal conveyance; who performs worship of demigods in exchange for payment (a *devala* or *grāma-yājī*); who eats the food of śūdras; who eats the food on the śrāddha days of the śūdras; who is a Brahmin devoid of devotion to Krishna; who is wicked and ferocious; who is a murderer; who is devoid of devotion to guru; who is afflicted with diseases; who always speaks lies; who approaches a Brahmin's wife for sex; who is a śūdra; who approaches his mother for sex; who cuts sacred banyan trees; who is a wife that kills her husband; who kills one's father and mother; who kills those who come under his protection; or who is a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya, or śūdra who steals jewels and gold. 🍍

— *Nārada Pañcarātra* 1.6.40-42, 45-51. Adapted from the translation by Swami Vijnananand. Parimal Publications, Delhi. 1997.

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bindu@gopaljiu.org

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